THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

in Shaping the

PERSONALITY OF STUDENTS

An Address to University Teachers

Covering:

Importance · Initiative · Student Responsibility · Institutional Role
A 10-Point Programme · Inspiring Quotes · The Indian Tradition · References

1. The Importance of Developing Personality

Personality development is far more than grooming or communication skills. It is the holistic shaping of a human being — their values, character, emotional resilience, social consciousness, intellectual curiosity, ethical backbone, and sense of purpose. It is what transforms a student who learns facts into a person who lives with meaning.

In the modern age, the world does not merely need professionals. It needs people of character — individuals who can lead with integrity, collaborate with empathy, innovate with courage, and serve with compassion. Academic knowledge is the vehicle; personality is the driver.

Why It Matters — At Every Level

- For the Individual: A developed personality gives a student confidence, clarity of purpose, emotional intelligence, and the resilience to handle adversity. It shapes their relationships, career success, and inner happiness.
- For Society: Nations are built by the character of their people. Corruption, division, and social apathy are, at their root, failures of personality — of values not instilled, of empathy never cultivated.
- For the Profession: In every field — medicine, law, engineering, education, public service — it is not just competence but character that determines whether a professional is truly great or merely capable.
- For Democracy: A vibrant democracy requires citizens who think critically, debate respectfully, and act responsibly. These are personality traits, shaped over years.

The ancient Indian ideal captures this beautifully — education is not just about Shiksha (instruction) but about Vidya (true knowledge), which includes self-

knowledge. A person of complete education knows not only their subject but also themselves.

2. Why Teachers Must Take the Initiative — and How

The question is often asked: Is personality development the job of the teacher? The answer is an emphatic Yes — not because teachers are therapists or life coaches, but because they are, after parents, the most formative adult presence in a young person's life.

Why Teachers Are Uniquely Placed

- Teachers spend hundreds of hours with students across formative years — a unique position of sustained, trusted influence.
- The classroom is a microcosm of society — it is the first real 'world' a young person navigates: authority, peers, competition, collaboration, failure, and recognition.
- A teacher's own personality — their enthusiasm, fairness, compassion, intellectual honesty — is itself the most powerful lesson they teach. Students absorb who teachers are, not just what they say.
- Teachers are in a position to observe students holistically — their strengths, fears, blind spots, and potential — in a way few others can.

How Teachers Can Take the Initiative

Personality development need not require separate sessions or extra burden. It can be woven naturally into everyday teaching:

1. Model the behaviour you wish to see: Demonstrate punctuality, intellectual humility, ethical decision-making, and respect for every student. Students mirror far more than they memorise.
2. Create a classroom culture of psychological safety: Students develop confidence, originality, and voice only when they are not afraid to be wrong. Celebrate questions. Never ridicule error.
3. Design tasks that build character alongside competence: Group projects that require collaboration; debates that require seeing multiple perspectives; presentations that build confidence; community-linked projects that build empathy.
4. Give feedback on how, not just what: Comment on a student's persistence, creative thinking, or growth in communication — not only on their grade.
5. Hold one-on-one or small-group conversations: Ask students about their aspirations, not just their assignments. These conversations signal that you see them as whole human beings.
6. Introduce ethical dimensions into your subject: Science has ethics. History has moral lessons. Literature has empathy. Law has justice. Every subject has a personality-shaping dimension.

7. Be a mentor, not merely an instructor: Make yourself accessible. Encourage students to come to you with doubts — academic or otherwise.

3. Can This Be Left to the Students Themselves?

There is a legitimate view that personality is ultimately self-developed — that no teacher can give another person character; it must be earned, chosen, and lived. This view has truth in it.

However, leaving personality development entirely to students carries serious implications:

What Students Can Do for Themselves

- Reading widely — especially biography, literature, philosophy, and history — develops perspective and wisdom.
- Journaling and self-reflection build self-awareness, the foundation of all character.
- Seeking out challenges, failures, and discomfort — internships, travel, community work — is irreplaceable experience.
- Finding mentors and role models beyond the classroom.
- Spiritual or contemplative practice — prayer, meditation, yoga — builds inner stability and depth.

The Implications of Leaving It Entirely to Students

- Unguided self-development is uneven and often driven by social media, peer pressure, or market forces — none of which necessarily build depth of character.
- Students from less privileged backgrounds, with fewer educated role models at home, are particularly disadvantaged when institutions abdicate this responsibility.
- Adolescence and early adulthood, when personality is most malleable, pass quickly. The window of structured influence, if missed, does not return.
- Without guidance, students may develop technical skills while remaining emotionally immature, ethically unmoored, or interpersonally difficult — a formula for professional failure and personal unhappiness.

The wise answer is a partnership: the institution creates conditions, the teacher guides and inspires, and the student takes ultimate ownership. Neither can succeed without the others.

4. Should Educational Institutions Accept This Responsibility?

The short answer is: Yes — and they must do so at every level of education, from primary school through university.

What Institutions Can Do

- Incorporate personality development into curriculum design — not as a separate 'soft skills' add-on, but embedded in pedagogy across all disciplines.
- Train teachers: Most teachers, as this address acknowledges, have never been formally exposed to personality development frameworks or pedagogical approaches to it. Faculty development programmes must address this.
- Create co-curricular infrastructure: Student councils, drama, debate, community service, sports, and arts are not luxuries — they are the laboratories of personality.
- Establish mentoring systems: Formalised faculty-student mentoring programmes with protected time and clear expectations.
- Design physical spaces that encourage community: Open common areas, group-work spaces, cultural activity halls — environments shape behaviour and belonging.
- Embed assessment of personal development: Portfolios, reflective journals, peer assessment, and community service records can be part of the student record without being intrusive.
- Celebrate character, not only achievement: Award schemes, recognition systems, and institutional culture should honour integrity, service, creativity, and resilience — not merely academic rank.

The Institutional Challenge

Many educational institutions are caught in a narrow conception of their purpose — as credentialling bodies rather than character-forming communities. Reforming this requires leadership, faculty buy-in, and sometimes, courage to resist the purely transactional model of education that market pressures encourage.

The National Education Policy 2020 of India, notably, explicitly reaffirms education's role in developing citizenship, values, and holistic human development — giving institutional support to exactly this vision.

5. A 10-Point Programme for Teachers

This programme is designed especially for teachers who, as the title of this address acknowledges, may not have been formally exposed to personality development frameworks. It is practical, gentle, and immediately actionable.

Point 1 — Know Yourself First

The most powerful tool you have is your own personality. Before you can shape others, you must understand yourself: your values, your blind spots, your communication style, your emotional triggers. Spend 15 minutes each week in honest self-reflection. Read one book each year on human psychology or self-development. You cannot give what you do not have.

Point 2 — Learn Every Student's Name and Story

This sounds simple — it is not. Behind every name is a family, a hope, a fear, and a specific intelligence. Make it your mission, in the first month of every academic year, to learn not just names but aspirations. Ask: 'What do you want to do in life? What is the one thing you find most difficult about this subject?' This single act transforms the student-teacher relationship.

Point 3 — Teach Through Questions, Not Answers

Socratic dialogue — asking probing questions rather than delivering conclusions — is one of the oldest and most powerful tools for developing critical thinking, which is a core personality trait. Shift at least 20% of your class time from lecture to structured questioning: 'What do you think? Why? Can you argue the opposite? What would happen if...?'

Point 4 — Design One 'Character Task' Per Semester

Create one assignment per semester that explicitly develops a personality dimension: a community service reflection paper (empathy and social consciousness); a group project with a conflict to resolve (collaboration and leadership); a self-assessment of learning failures (resilience and honesty); a presentation to an unfamiliar audience (confidence and communication). These need not be graded heavily — the growth is the point.

Point 5 — Share Your Own Journey

Nothing opens a student's mind more than a teacher who is willing to say: 'I was afraid of this too. I made this mistake. Here is what I learned.' Biographical honesty — appropriate and selective — makes you human, builds trust, and models the very self-awareness you are trying to cultivate. Students remember stories far longer than they remember facts.

Point 6 — Introduce Great Lives and Great Ideas

Across all disciplines, weave in the lives of extraordinary people: scientists who persevered through failure, leaders who chose truth over convenience, artists who created beauty in adversity. Assigning one biography per year and discussing it in class — even briefly — expands students' sense of what is possible for a human life. The NCERT and NEP both support this integrative approach.

Point 7 — Build Emotional Intelligence, Not Just IQ

Explicitly teach and discuss: empathy, listening, managing frustration, resolving conflict, giving and receiving feedback. Even in a technical subject, there are moments — group work, presentation, examination stress — when emotional intelligence can be pointed to and discussed. A simple debrief after a group project ('What was hardest about working together? What did you learn about yourself?') can be transformative.

Point 8 — Create Rituals of Reflection

Begin or end class with a brief reflective moment: a quote to ponder, a question to think about silently for 60 seconds, or a one-sentence journal entry. This builds the habit of introspection, which is the foundation of character development.

The Indian gurukul tradition always began with a moment of stillness — there is great wisdom in this.

Point 9 — Recognise Progress, Not Only Performance

Most educational systems reward the already-capable. Make a point of noticing and acknowledging growth: the student who was silent and spoke up, the one who failed and tried again, the one who helped a classmate at cost to their own time. Public recognition of character — not just marks — reshapes classroom culture over time.

Point 10 — Form a Small Teachers' Learning Circle

You need not do this alone. Form a small group of three to five colleagues who meet once a month — not to discuss administration, but to share: What worked in the classroom this month that went beyond teaching the subject? What struggles did students bring that you were not sure how to handle? Peer learning among teachers is among the most powerful professional development tools available, and it costs nothing.

6. Four Inspiring Quotes

> *"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."*
>
> **— William Arthur Ward**

> *"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."*
>
> **— W.B. Yeats**

> *"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education."*
>
> **— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

> *"Sa vidya ya vimuktaye — That alone is knowledge which liberates."*
>
> **— Vishnu Purana — The Ancient Indian Ideal of True Education**

7. The Indian Traditional Approach — Charitra Nirman

In the Indian philosophical and pedagogical tradition, what we today call 'personality development' has been understood for millennia under the concept of Charitra Nirman — the formation of character. It is inseparable from education itself.

Key Concepts from the Indian Tradition

- Vidya (True Knowledge): The Vedic and Upanishadic traditions distinguish between Apara Vidya (worldly, technical knowledge) and Para Vidya (knowledge of the Self, of ultimate reality). A complete education addresses both. The teacher — the Guru — was responsible for both.
- Guru-Shishya Parampara (Teacher-Disciple Tradition): This relationship was not merely transactional. The guru was a model of character; the shishya

(student) lived in close proximity to the guru not merely to learn a subject, but to absorb a way of being. The gurukul was a personality-development ashram as much as a school.

- Pancha Kosha (Five Sheaths of the Self): Taittiriya Upanishad describes the human being as layered: the physical body (Annamaya), the vital/energetic self (Pranamaya), the mental self (Manomaya), the intellectual self (Vijnanamaya), and the blissful self (Anandamaya). True education addresses all five — not just the intellectual layer.
- Brahmacharya (Disciplined Life): The gurukul system emphasised self-discipline, simplicity, service to the teacher, and restraint of desires — not as punishment, but as the conditions under which character and wisdom grow.
- Swadhyaya (Self-Study): One of the Niyamas of Patanjali's Yoga, Swadhyaya means the regular, disciplined study of sacred texts and of oneself. It is the practice of continuous self-examination — a form of reflective practice entirely consonant with modern personality development.
- Swami Vivekananda's Vision: Vivekananda declared that the aim of education is 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' His programme for national regeneration was built on character — physical strength, intellectual clarity, and spiritual conviction. He exhorted teachers to be the embodiment of what they teach: 'Teach yourself first; then teach others.'
- Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education: Sri Aurobindo envisioned education as the cultivation of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the human being — a vision that prefigures modern holistic education by decades. Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry have been living experiments in this philosophy.
- Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan: Tagore believed that education in harmony with nature, through art, music, poetry, and freedom of thought, was essential to full human development. His school at Shantiniketan remains a testament to personality-centred education.

These are not museum pieces. They are living traditions with profound relevance for the contemporary Indian classroom — and they give every Indian teacher a profound indigenous vocabulary for this most important of educational tasks.

8. Useful Book and Web References

Books

- Swami Vivekananda — Education (Compiled from his Complete Works, published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata). The foundational Indian text on character-centred education.
- Sri Aurobindo — The Human Cycle and A System of National Education (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry). A visionary philosophy of integral education.
- Rabindranath Tagore — My School and Personality (Visva-Bharati Publications). Tagore's own essays on education and human development.

- J. Krishnamurti — Education and the Significance of Life (HarperOne). A radical and deeply thought-provoking argument that the purpose of education is self-understanding and freedom.
- Parker J. Palmer — The Courage to Teach (Jossey-Bass). A profound exploration of teaching as a personal and soul-level calling. Indispensable for university teachers.
- Daniel Goleman — Emotional Intelligence (Bantam Books). The foundational text on EQ — its importance in life and career, and how it can be developed.
- Howard Gardner — Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Basic Books). Essential reading for teachers to understand the range of human potential beyond IQ.
- Alfie Kohn — Punished by Rewards (Houghton Mifflin). A research-based challenge to the grade-and-reward model of education, with implications for character development.
- Nel Noddings — The Challenge to Care in Schools (Teachers College Press). A compelling argument for placing care and relationship at the centre of education.
- Government of India — National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education). Freely available online. Chapter on higher education explicitly addresses holistic development.

Web Resources

- Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry — www.sriaurobindoashram.org — Rich resources on integral education.
- Krishnamurti Foundation India — www.kfionline.org — Materials on education as self-understanding.
- Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture — www.sriramakrishna.org — Vivekananda's educational writings and resources.
- National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) — www.niepa.ac.in — Research and policy on Indian education reform.
- Greater Good Science Centre, UC Berkeley — greatergood.berkeley.edu — Research-based resources on empathy, gratitude, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning.
- Edutopia (George Lucas Educational Foundation) — www.edutopia.org — Practical resources for teachers on social-emotional learning, project-based learning, and classroom community.
- Positive Education Schools Association — www.pesa.edu.au — International movement applying positive psychology to school and university education.

A Closing Thought

Every great teacher, looking back across a lifetime in the classroom, remembers not the syllabus they taught, but the students they changed. And every student, reflecting on the education that truly shaped them, remembers not a textbook, but a teacher — who saw something in them, who held them to a higher standard, who modelled what it means to live well. That teacher is you, if you choose to be.

The influence of a great teacher never dies. It passes from student to student, generation to generation — invisible, incalculable, and eternal. This is the extraordinary privilege — and responsibility — of the teacher.

— End of Address —